

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Information
December 15, 1970

TOP SECRET

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT
FROM: HENRY A. KISSINGER *HK*
SUBJECT: Assessment of Cambodian Military Situation

An accurate, factual assessment of the situation in Cambodia is difficult to achieve because of the lack of valid information relating to FANK capabilities and enemy actions. While the Lon Nol strategy is well known, the detailed planning information on FANK operations in support of this strategy is not available on a timely or reliable basis. As a result, many of the points made in this assessment are judgmental in nature.

The enemy's current effort in Cambodia appears designed to ensure the security of his logistic corridor from southern Laos, build up the insurgency, isolate Phnom Penh, interdict Cambodian LOCs, and force the FANK into a defensive posture where it must react to Communist initiatives. While basically employing economy of force tactics, the enemy is prepared to raise the level of combat where conditions are favorable. Enemy strength in Cambodia is estimated to number 50,000--60,000 VC/NVA and 5,000--10,000 Khmer Communists. Approximately half the VC/NVA are combat troops.

Enemy forces have already cut Routes 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 and Route 1 is threatened. Route 5 has been periodically interdicted and will probably come under increasing pressure. The only major water route, the Mekong River, is susceptible to interdiction and the enemy can be expected to attempt to block the channel by mining or the sinking of a large vessel. Control of Route 1 and the Mekong River is tenuous; it is anticipated that these arteries could be priority targets for early attack. This would leave the capital with only its air LOC. The isolation of Phnom Penh would weaken and disrupt the central government by undermining its economic base and political influence. A more immediate result would be the isolation of FANK forces in the countryside from their supply centers which are located in the Phnom Penh area.

Assuming continued Allied military and logistic support to the FANK, this enemy probably cannot overrun Cambodia. The Communists could, however, within the near term, commit a sizeable

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number of the additional 59 VC/NVA battalions deployed in Cambodia between the RVN border and the Mekong. The FANK in all probability could not cope with this enlarged force without additional outside assistance, to include a greater commitment of ARVN forces. Furthermore, the combat activity during the past two weeks has highlighted the marginal combat effectiveness of FANK forces. Only time can remedy the deficiencies in FANK leadership, training, and experience.

Significant enemy supply movements into Cambodia have not been detected to date. However, within the next four to six weeks some of the supplies which entered the Laotian Panhandle since mid-November should be arriving in the enemy's Base Areas in Kratie, Chhlong, and Prek Kak. While the enemy's actual logistical situation is unclear, there is no indication that a lack of supplies has been a critical limiting factor in his current operations. The enemy's most likely course of action in Cambodia in the near term will be to continue interdiction and harassment throughout the country, intensify his efforts to isolate Phnom Penh, and exploit his current position in the Kompong Cham area. Should the enemy initially experience a measure of success against the combined ARVN/FANK forces at Kompong Cham, he will probably attempt to exploit his advantage. However, if the ARVN/FANK task force is effective, the VN/NVA forces probably will avoid contact and await a more favorable opportunity.

FANK forces have undergone significant changes and growth from an ill-trained and equipped force of about 37,500 men in March 1970, to approximately 163,000 men today. However, the leadership available at the beginning of the expansion period, considered barely adequate at that time, is the same core of officers and NCOs available today. An important adjunct to leadership is an effective command and control system. In addition to equipment, training and experience, a structure is necessary which facilitates timely accurate reporting and, in turn, leads to balanced tactical decisions and timely reaction. The conflicting and delayed reports of the friendly and enemy situation emanating from FANK would indicate that such a structure is not functioning at this time.

Training has been completed for 18,761 Cambodians and 3,755 additional troops are receiving out-of-country training. FANK in-country formal training has been conducted for 27 companies. The 165 million dollar MAP add-on will overcome many unsophisticated equipment and ammunition shortages. The high morale and determination of the Cambodian people is a most encouraging factor, but the GKR forces must be rated marginally effective at best.

Lon Nol is employing an economy of force strategy which concentrates friendly forces south of Routes 6 and 7 and relinquishes in

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the near time frame control of the less populated northeast area of Cambodia to the enemy. This strategy is designed to utilize available friendly military forces for the defense of large cities, major LOCs, bases, and seaports and security of rice and coffee areas.

While a reassessment of this strategy is not considered necessary, it should be realized that the accomplishment of near term goals of the GKR will not be realized until FANK has reached the level of effectiveness necessary to establish effective control of selected areas. FANK inability to maintain LOCs in an open condition has been amply demonstrated. Weakness of the GKR in-depth control of the population has been manifested in the recent increase in terrorist-type incidents.

The defense of Cambodia is strengthened by both US and VNAF aircraft including fighter bombers, fixed wing gunships and B-52s which attack suitable targets. The enemy build-up is hampered by the intensive US air interdiction campaign directed against enemy LOCs which extend through Laos into Cambodia and RVN. VNN operations deny infiltration by sea and provide security on the lower Mekong. The RVNAF are presently conducting three cross-border operations involving 10,891 troops, to prevent reestablishment of VC/NVA base areas. A fourth operation was initiated 14 December when the assault echelon of a 2,170 man task force landed at and is operating in the vicinity of Kompong Cham. RVNAF, in coordination with the FANK, is actively planning follow-on operations in the Chup Plantation, Kampot-Takeo, Lompong Som and Phnom Penh areas.

Careful balance is maintained between RVNAF participation in out-of-country operations and the continuation of in-country efforts. The RVNAF ability to participate to any major extent in Cambodia is related directly to the generation of forces in excess to in-country priority efforts, ability of US forces to relieve RVNAF for out-of-country operations and the provision by the US of requisite support to insure success. The GVN recognizes the impact of maintaining a friendly GKR. Considerable support has been provided to the GKR in the forms of equipment, limited training of FANK forces and the conduct of operations within Cambodia. However, GVN/GKR ability to respond with speed and firepower is constrained by extremely limited airlift and helicopter capability.

In summary, Asianization of the efforts against the common enemy is being put to a test, with a sober picture painted in light of the current enemy capability and demonstrated level of FANK effectiveness.

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HAK

This was prepared
by the Robinson based
on review of the above
reports to the Mayor.

I recommend you
not send to President
at least until Sen. Haig
returns.

File but don't
forward.